

VI. MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BE SAVED.

58. Read Mt 7:13-14, Lk 13:23-30, Read Mt 13:9-17, Lk 14:28-35

If Jesus ever said something scary this is it. The idea that someone wants to belong to Jesus, and tries to belong to Jesus, but can't, is sobering. If I make enough effort I belong to Jesus, and I have to thank God that I do. But how is it that some don't. Two things come to mind and there are a lot of scriptures to confirm it. The first is sin. If you won't give up your sinning you are not making enough effort to be saved. If you are putting something before God you are also not making enough effort to be saved.

Those who claim Jesus as their savior will not be saved. Those who do God's work will not be saved. Only those who do God's will will be saved. See Mt 7:21. Trust in Jesus and Jesus alone to save you and do everything He commands you. And the first thing He commands is to repent.

It is a characteristic, not proof, of the saved that they grow with time to be more and more like Jesus. If you are not changing to be more and more like Jesus then you need to make more effort. If you went to the altar years ago but nothing has changed in your life you need to make more effort. I am concerned that you will be lost.

It is not in the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit that show we are saved. It is a changed life, the fruit of the Spirit, the increasing obedience to Jesus word. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. If we do what Jesus commanded we will certainly do what is needed for salvation.

How much sin does Jesus allow us. As for the past, repent and you will be forgiven. That means you are resolved not to sin. Going forward through the present into the future you are not allowed to sin. Jesus said, "Go and sin no more." See John 8:11. If you allow yourself some sin even one you have not repented of that sin. God is patient as He waits for people to repent, but He makes no compromise with evil.

Let go of your sin, all of it. Do whatever it takes. Jesus said, "Better to enter into eternal life maimed than to have your whole body thrown into hell." See Mt 18:8-9. Ask God if your sin is OK. If the Holy Spirit does not say "no!" then you are not hearing Him.

Put nothing before God. God said, "You shall have no other God's before me." This is something that God tests in His people all the time. He puts His hand on something in our life and says, "Can I have this?" Sometimes we come to a fork in the road. We have to make a choice between two things. The one thing is God represented usually by something He has commanded. The other choice is something very important to us. With the choice we make, the truth is made known of what really is more important to us.

We may be hearing God's call to do certain things. Maybe it is something simple like, "Go to church." or "Join the men's group." But then we say, "I'll do all that when the house is finished." Is the house your God? Will the house save you from your sins? I see people do something like this: "When the house is finished..." But when the house is finished they are into something else. And they don't do what they said they would. The value of a man does not rest with what he has earned, bought, built or done. None of these things last. What lasts is the word of the Lord and those who have found eternal life.

I don't want to be legalistic because God is not. Regarding these things of our personal priority He does not look at the tiny details of what we have done. But He is always looking at the heart. One man may rarely be in church, but pays attention. Another man is always there, but his thoughts are not. His mind is somewhere else and not on God. The man who is closer to God, who has put God first is the one who

is almost always there and who is almost always focused on God when he is there and who is focused on God a lot of the time even when he is not there.

If we can't spend a half hour with God everyday, focused on Him, because we are too busy. Then all the things for which we found a half hour for are more important, such as: TV, reading the paper, chatting at work, seeing a film, reading a book, pursuing our hobby, talking on the phone, listening to music, playing a video game, surfing the net. The list of spiritually useless things people waste their time on goes on and on.

59. Believe. Read Jn 1:1-28 and Jn 3:25-36

Why must we believe? Is it possible to have faith in Jesus and to obey Him if we do not believe? And is it possible to obey Jesus if we do not believe and have faith?

We can not save ourselves. Even after we accept Jesus, were it possible to never sin again this would not be enough. Obeying God is the best testimony of repentance. But though we must repent, repentance and obedience can not save us. For we sinned in our earlier life. And sin must be judged, condemned and punished by God. God is light, in Him there is no darkness. He is completely righteous. He can not let it go.

If God made something (humanity) and although it was not made to do evil it was capable of it, and this thing did do evil, and God did nothing about it, God would be guilty of condoning evil. He would be an accessory to the crime of evil. Consider it from His perspective. He has made all there is and made it to be good. Until the fall recorded in Genesis 3 there had never been any evil or sin. God allowed the possibility of sin and evil when He made mankind. This is because mankind is free to choose good or evil. This the animals can not do. God faced a dilemma. The most righteous scenario is that He would make creatures capable of choosing good or evil and they would choose good. But if they choose evil God has made evil possible in a world where evil was not possible. How can God be righteous if He allows the possibility of evil? He would be unjust to allow evil. God promises that He will judge, condemn and punish evil. In this way justice is fulfilled. The punishment for people who do evil is hell.

But Christians have done evil as well as the non-Christians. How is it that there is no punishment for them? There is punishment for them but not on them. The punishment the Christians have earned is laid on Jesus.

How can we partake of the salvation that Jesus has provided? In a few words, we need to belong to Jesus. If we belong to Jesus He protects us from our punishment by taking it upon Himself when He died on the cross. So how do we belong to Him? We must do several things, we must confess and repent of our sins. We must obey Jesus. We must believe in Him and have faith in Him. If we do not have faith in Jesus we do not believe in Him nor do we believe Him. How can we think we obey Him if we do not believe Him.

See Lk 18:7-8. It would be an injustice against Jesus for us to accept His salvation without believing in Him, believing Him, or having faith in Him. It would be too great of an injustice against Him. To belong to Jesus we must have faith in Him, confess and repent of our sins and we must obey Him.

60. Be born of water and the Spirit. Read Jn 3:1-21

How can one be born of water? By water Jesus means the water of baptism, being baptized in Jesus name. How can we know this is so? See Jn 3:22-23. See Mt 28:18-20.

How can one be born of the Spirit? There is only one "the Spirit". That is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God.

See Jn 1 29-34. Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. See Jn 6:60-63. The words Jesus spoke are spirit and are life. See Jn 7:37-39. Those who believe in Jesus will receive the Spirit. See Jn 14: 15-18. If we obey Jesus we will receive the Spirit and Jesus will come to us through His Spirit. Read Jn 15:26. Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father to...Who? Those who belong to Jesus. How can we know this? Read Jn 17:2,9,24. John chapters 13 through 17 are the words Jesus spoke at the last supper. He was with His people and in ch 17 was praying to the Father for His people. Read Jn 20:22. Jesus breathed on His people and they received the Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus and obey Him receive His spirit and belong to Him. Jesus will speak to His people through His Spirit. Will we listen? Will we obey? If not, will we belong to Him?

61. Feed on Jesus. Read Jn 6:51-58 But read all of Jn 6

Hopefully the concept of feeding on Jesus stopped you in your tracks. Is Jesus food, and is He the only food we can eat? Let's look at the metaphor. Jesus is the way the truth and the life and no one can come to God except by Him. See Jn 14:6. He said it so it must be so; that we can only be saved by Him. Also, we must take desperate steps to be saved See again Mt 7:13-14, Lk 13:23-30, Mt 13:9-17, Lk 14:28-35, Mt 11:12-15. Consider that to save us Jesus had to die. The requirement that Jesus had to die, the desperate effort required of us, and the singleness of the means to be saved make the concept of feeding on Jesus a good metaphor. We must be desperate enough to eat Him. Our eating Him kills Him and there is no other way. Jesus comes to us and says "Here is my body. Eat it or die." I'm thinking that the saved understand the suitability of this imagery. If you find it repugnant I don't think you understand how desperate your situation is and the drastic measures required to save you. See Lk 16:16. Force is required to be saved.

We need to be desperate enough to admit that our sins were lethal. They will kill Jesus or they will kill us. We have to be desperate enough to belong to Jesus, abandoning everything else. It used to be that when people were married they were asked, "Do you take this...to be your...forsaking all others?" You may had a commitment to another but all that is set aside when you marry. When you belong to Jesus you forsake everyone and everything for Him.

But there is more than metaphor here. Jesus said my body is real food, and my blood is real drink. The Jews took Him literally as did His disciples. He did not dispute that it should be taken literally. He didn't explain His words, for they had understood Him. In holy communion we eat His flesh and drink His blood as He said. Paul warns us to carefully recognize that Jesus is literally in the holy communion. If we don't recognize Him we partake at the risk of our lives. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-30. Many denominations teach that holy communion is only symbolic. But how could a symbol kill you?

But some will say, "Jesus is obviously not literally in the bread!" But it would be more accurate if they said "Jesus is not physically in the bread" For they can see that Jesus is not physically in the bread. And seeing is believing. But seeing is not believing. Seeing is knowing. What if there are tiny particles of Jesus in the bread? What if there are Jesus molecules in the bread? We would not see them yet they would be there. This is ridiculous. But if Jesus were spiritually in the bread rather than physically in the bread. He would be literally in the bread and not just symbolically in the bread.

Here is another metaphor. Two men draw up a business contract and sign it. Is the contract a symbol? Is it just a symbol of their agreement? Is it physically their agreement? Is it literally their agreement? Is it legally their agreement? If it is only symbolically their agreement, then if it were burned their agreement would still exist even if no copies had been made. If it is physically their agreement, then if it were burned their agreement would not exist even if copies had been made. But if it is legally their agreement it is still binding if it can be proven that it existed whether it now exists or not. Jesus says that there is a covenant, a contract, between Him and His people. When we share the wine in communion we enter into that covenant if we believe it is Him.

Here is another metaphor. When you pick up your Bible and open it to the Gospel of John, what are you looking at? Is it a symbol of the Gospel of John? If so you would learn nothing from it. If it were physically the Gospel of John, you would be looking at a manuscript about 1900 years old. It is literally the Gospel of John. For you are looking at His words. It is spiritually the Gospel of John for it contains the same spiritual truth.

63. Lose all rather than be lost, Read Mt 18:8-9, Mk 9:43-48

First we need to consider how literal is Jesus being in this passage. What sins do we commit with our eyes? Lust begins with the eyes as do envy and covetousness. For so many things that we want, our wanting begins with seeing. But Jesus says gouge out one eye. How much less lust, envy and covetousness would we have if we saw through one eye not two? Not much, I think. We would lose our ability to perceive distance but we would still recognize what we are looking at, and so we would still want it.

So many sins are carried out with our hands, Theft comes first, but also murder and every form of violence. Violence would definitely be more difficult with one hand, but not impossible. Theft would not be that much more difficult. So much theft is see and grab at least with smaller objects.

What sins do we commit with our feet?

Kicking each other, but it's not a big problem. Jay walking, walking on the grass, stomping the flowers. The problem with the feet is where they take us. But having one foot we would still get there, just slower.

So a strict literal interpretation does not make sense. But you have to consider the literal first. I think that many liberal Christians are bound for hell because they thought Jesus meant something else when He said "Go and sin no more!"

So what if we gouged out two eyes, or cut off both hands or feet? Not having any sight would mean a great reduction in lust from a distance. No hands would make theft a lot harder. But there would still be lust. In cultures where women are covered head to toe there is still lust. It has been said that a glimpse of a little ankle can be exciting. The mind fills in the details. And of course we would still hear the women's voices. Did you ever listen to a woman on the phone or radio or on a recording and decide that she sounded hot? Then you meet her and decide that she does not look hot. You do not need your eyes to lust. They just make it a lot easier. Therefore Jesus is speaking metaphorically.

Time to examine the metaphorical. Whereas lust, envy, and covetousness are stimulated by sight, and they are all kinds of desires, the eyes represent what we desire. The hands represent what we do. The feet represent where we go. I'm surprised Jesus didn't mention the tongue. Because most sin is in what we say. So let's add the tongue now. Many Americans are eating themselves to death so let's add the stomach. The eyes are our desires, the hands our actions, the feet our travels, the stomach our appetite, the tongue our words. I'm pretty certain that Jesus never meant the reproductive organs, but some have thought so. See Mt 19:10-12. I know I think things that I should not be thinking so I will add my brain. Many people are too lazy so let's add the buttocks to the list. For all those who are way too nosy let's add the nose. And for those who like to hear gossip or obscenity let's add the ears.

Now we can restate what Jesus has said comprehensively. "It is better to enter into life without your hands, your feet, your eyes, your tongue, your stomach, your genitalia, your brain, your buttocks, your nose, or your ears than to have all these things and be thrown into hell." When the metaphor is unpackaged we have: "It is better to enter into life having lost your ability to: do anything, go

anywhere, want anything, say anything, eat anything, make love, think, rest, learn anyone's business, hear any news, than to have all these things and be thrown into hell." Hell is a very nasty place to be for

a short time let alone a very long time. So we conclude that giving up everything to avoid hell makes sense.

But, deep inside we think that we should not have to give up what we naturally do, what we reasonably do. Therefore, what Jesus is saying is this, "Give up anything that is going to kill you. Give up what is normal, natural, and what you take for granted if it is killing you. That's what it might take, to live." Paul says the same thing. See First Corinthians 6:9-13. The wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. If doing what is natural and reasonable leads to sin, give it up, before it kills you.

63.Be Wise. Read Mt 25:1-13.

There is a relatively wide opinion on what this parable means. For one thing it describes wedding customs that are greatly different from ours. Not the least of which: the bridegroom is marrying ten virgins at one time. My thinking is that Jesus does not choose the wedding as the theme of the parable because there are a lot of details that have theological meaning. He chooses this setting because of the emotional impact produced, that a lack of prudence leads to a complete rejection.

Even so let us assign roles to each of the characters and events. The bride-groom is the authority so He must be God. Specifically He must be Jesus. Jesus says that He goes to prepare a place for us. See Jn 14:1-3. This is what a bride-groom did. After the betrothal he would go build a house for the bride. When it was prepared he came and brought the bride home. Also see Rev 19:6-9. The church, that is the multitude of those who belong to Jesus, is the bride of Christ.

The ten virgins represent ten followers of Jesus. The five who did not bring oil in jars were foolish, imprudent and not diligent. They represent followers of Jesus who are foolish, imprudent and not diligent. The five who brought oil in jars were wise, prudent and diligent. They represent followers of Jesus who are wise, prudent and diligent.

The long period of waiting represents the wait from the time we begin to follow Jesus until His glorious reappearing.

Others read more detail into what follows than I do. I don't see what follows as a sequence of events. I see the following as being in fact just two events. The first is the long term of the present age during which the same things are repeated over and over again in many lives. The second is the judgment which ends the age.

The observation of the foolish virgins represents the observation of some of the followers of Jesus all along, that they have not been wise, prudent and diligent. The advice of the wise virgins to buy oil is the advice that diligent followers have been giving to the non-diligent followers of Jesus all along. "Do what is diligent, buy oil", meaning be diligent followers of Jesus keeping all His commands. This has always been good advice.

But when the day of judgment is at hand it is too late. At last the foolish virgins realize the importance of being diligent but it is too late. The time for diligence has passed. Now is the time of judgment. The errand of the foolish virgins in the night to buy oil and the arrival of the bride-groom while they are gone, the shutting of the door, the return of the virgins, and the condemnation they receive must be taken all together, and as meaning "Judgment has come there is nothing more that can be done.

Wandering about the streets of the city at night was not something that people normally did. There was no light. Without a torch the people you met could not be identified. The night was the time for thieves, murderers, adulterers and prostitutes and those who visit adulterers and prostitutes. These five virgins would in all likelihood be mistaken for prostitutes.

The bride-groom is an important man, perhaps a king. Who else would marry ten women at one time. He can't marry a prostitute. He must marry a virgin so that there will never be any doubt that the

children she bears to Him are in fact his. Therefore when the five foolish virgins return he treats them with contempt suggesting that they are in fact fornicators, adulterers or prostitutes.

What is represented by the errand, return and dismissal of the five foolish virgins is this. The "followers" of Jesus who do not prudently obey what He has commanded are not in fact following Him. Any attempt to obey when Jesus' return is seen to be eminent is useless. It is too late. Judgment is come. The phony followers will be cast out into the darkness. It will be seen that they were not really following Jesus at all. They were pursuing other things. What other things does not matter. Doing what Jesus has told them to do was all that mattered and it is not what they did.

The only thing we have to do is: everything He tells us.

64. Be Ready. Read Mt 24:42-44, Lk 12:35-40, and

Lk 21:34-36, Mk 13:32-37

This is another passage that might require some background. Generally people put out their lamps when it was time for bed. Oil cost money. There would probably be some hot coals banked in the hearth so they could start a fire the next day.

If during the night someone is pounding on the door someone would have to get up carefully walk to the fire pit or fire pot and light a taper of some kind then find the lamp and light it. They could answer the door and be able to tell who it was pounding on it. This took time.

If instead someone was expected at the door during the night. One or more servants would sit up dressed and ready. A lamp would be lit and trimmed to save oil. If someone came to the door a servant could quickly trim the lamp for light and open the door. This is how servants would be prepared when they knew their master was out at night but would be returning home before dawn. They would be ready to spring into action to let Him in the door and do whatever he required.

Servants who knew their master was out at night and would be returning home before dawn yet had put out the lamps and undressed for bed would be considered useless and quite stupid. Such servants deserved a beating for being unprepared to let their master into the house requiring Him to stand outside in the dark an easy mark for thieves and murderers.

And so in this passage Jesus is telling us to be diligent and prepared for when He returns. We need to be as we ought to be when He returns. Well then, how ought we to be? We ought to be obeying all He has commanded us.

65. Leaders of Jesus' church must be ready for His return. Read Mt 24:45-51 and Lk 12:41-48

When a man traveled away from home he had to leave someone in charge of the household. Assuming there was no wife or son or other close relation and even if there was as few as two servants one servant must be in charge to see that everything runs as it should while the master is gone. Typically the master was a farmer. There was a lot of work that had to be done in a certain way and at a certain time. Running the household was an important responsibility that called for someone smart enough to get it done and diligent enough to see that it was done.

By far the largest amount of labor done on a farmstead would be to grow food. Food was money. A certain amount of grain insured that a person would be able to live and work for a certain period of time.

Servants were only profitable if they produced more than they consumed. If not, they would be sold. Each servant needed enough food to provide the energy to work. Depending on the servant and the work they did they required more or less food. Too little food and they slowly lost weight until they could no longer do the work. Too much food and they would put on fat or just burn it up. Most

servants would gladly eat more than they needed to just as we do today. Being fed too much food could tip the balance between profitability or not for a certain servant. Therefore the job of allotting the daily food to the household was an important responsibility.

In the parable of the prodigal son the son remembers that his father's servants were well fed.

In the metaphor at hand Jesus compares two hypothetical servants. One executes the responsibility assigned Him. When the master returns he finds that the servant has been trustworthy. Being trustworthy with an important thing meant that the servant would be trustworthy with a really important thing. And so the responsible servant is given great authority and responsibility. This is considered both an honor and a reward just as a promotion in one's job is today.

The other hypothetical servant is wicked. He neglects his responsibilities and instead uses his authority to lord it over the other servants dealing out unearned punishments as an expression of dominance and power. No doubt every slight and injury, real or imagined, the servant suffered at the hands of the other servants would be avenged and several times over. Not only this but the servant eats more than he should and probably the master's choice foods that he is not allowed to eat.

On top of it all he drinks and gets drunk. It is unlikely that a typical master ever gave his servants any wine at all. What would be the profit in that. And of course being drunk would increase all the other damage being done and add to it the fact that the other servants could now run amok as well, for the drunken chief servant would not know what was happening.

The master of the wastrel servant will of course return at an unexpected time. That was the nature of travel and business. He is so enraged, and rightfully so, that he no longer has any use for the servant. But rather than assigning Him hard labor in the vineyard or fields or even selling Him the master proceeds to brutally murder the servant. This was not legal according to the law of Moses but probably not unheard of or completely unexpected in Jesus' day.

Finally Jesus takes His listeners right out of the metaphor and adds that the wicked leader of Jesus' people represented by the wicked servant will be assigned a place with the unbelievers. This is to say he is thrown into hell.

In the passage in Luke Jesus goes on to say that people who know what they needed to do but did not do it will be greatly punished. To know what Jesus wants you to do and to not do it is to be wayward and disrespect Him. When Jesus tells you to do something you will have no doubt it was Him who told you (no one in the scriptures ever was in doubt that God had spoken to them when He had). When Jesus tells you to do something you will have no doubt what it was He told you (no one in the scriptures ever was in doubt about what God had told them). Once Jesus has told you to do something you need to do it just as much as you need to obey the Ten Commandments.